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INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 000009

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#)
SUBJECT: ACTIVISTS CHARGED WITH INTENT TO DISTRIBUTE
PROPAGANDA

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 007
[1](#)B. LIBREVILLE 003

Classified By: Poloff Leslie Doumbia for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Civil society activist Marc Ona is among several NGO activists reportedly charged under Article 88 of Gabon's Penal Code with the intent to distribute "propaganda, written or oral, that could disturb the peace, incite a revolt against the authorities, attack the Republic of Gabon by tarnishing the prestige of its institutions, provoke the disunity of its citizens, or incite racial, religious or tribal hate, or generally threaten the vital interests of the Republic and nation." This crime carries a sentence of six month to five years imprisonment and a fine of up to 250,000 CFA (around USD 500). Ambassador will meet with the defense team January 8 to confirm the charges.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ona and the other activists were taken before the attorney general January 7, where they were charged with the intent to distribute propaganda. The government claims that the defendants' intent to distribute the open letter to President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba from "Les Acteurs Libres de la Societe Civile Gabonaise" violates Gabonese laws. The letter criticizes President Bongo's use of Gabon's resources for his and his family and cohort's personal use to the detriment of the country's population as a whole. Following the arraignment, the detainees were transferred to the city's central prison. Four journalists were allegedly released.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Conditions within the central prison are not yet known. However the detainees are permitted to receive food, medicine, and other essentials from family members. In an impromptu statement following the arraignment, one of the lawyers for the detainees addressed a large crowd of friends and family telling them to bring mattresses and other supplies to the prison for their loved ones. Post will continue to monitor the situation closely.

COMMENT

[1](#)4. (C) Gabonese authorities believe that by attacking the President the detainees have exceeded acceptable activities of civil society and pose a serious threat to authority. President Bongo, always sensitive to criticism of himself and his family, appears to be taking steps to silence his detractors once and for all, even at the risk of tarnishing Gabon's reputation. END COMMENT.
REDDICK